medical attention, food,
and rides to the health sites
come checkup time.

As the men died, I wept
with their wives and families.
I was there to comfort them,
to offer fifty dollars
if they let the doctors
"operate"—
cut open the deceased
from scrotum sack to skull.
They were usually horrified
by my offer,
fearing disfigurement
or the courting of blasphemy.
I assured them no one would know
that their hearts and brains
had been removed.
I suggested fifty dollars
could cover burial costs
and buy unexpected food
and clothes.

I never thought my silence
a symptom of bad blood.
I never considered my care complicity.
I was a Colored nurse, a proud
graduate of Tuskegee Institute,
one of few, honored by my profession.
I had orders, important duties,
a government career.



# VOICES

IN MEMORY OF WILLIAM DeLOACH, AGE FIVE

My hands disappear
gloved in crimson flames.
They drip like wax
with your blood
burning the floor.
Nothing about this alarms me.
Nothing appears unusual.

I open the refrigerator
and place your head
on the top shelf.
Blood streaks
the white-shelled eggs below.
The voices of my waking world,
the captors of my sleep
are satisfied. Silent.
They are leaving
as I wax the kitchen floor
for the seventh time.

Over many months
the voices spoke to me.
As I tried to sleep,
when I rode the bus
or shopped for food
they were with me.
I tried to flee
but the voices pursued.
No drug soothed me.